

US

Intimate Cindy

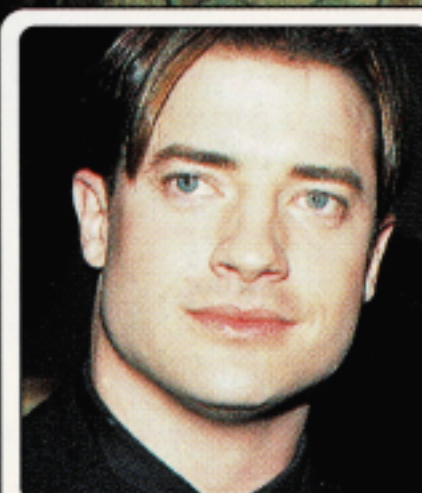
OH, BABY!

The Supermom-to-be on her devastating divorce ("Richard got a bad rap"); how she found true love; and skinny models ("I want to celebrate my curves")

STARS & THEIR MOMS

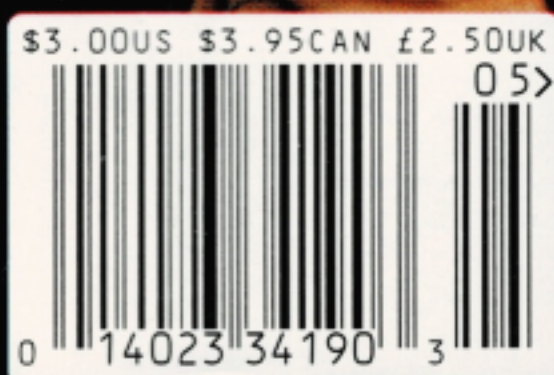


MEG RYAN, MADONNA
Seven rules for being a Superwoman



BRENDAN FRASER
Gets Personal

**HOLLYWOOD'S
NEW SLIM-
DOWN CRAZE**



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**THE US
INTERVIEW**

Brendan FRASER

Behind his roles as a lovable lug or as an object of desire stands a man who is not afraid to talk about his passions and, as we see here, not afraid to cry >>PHOTOGRAPH BY ANDREW SOUTHAM

**BY JOE
RHODES**

THERE'S A LOOK ABOUT BRENDAN FRASER, A wide-eyed, innocent, new-to-this-world look that no matter how hard he might try, he cannot disguise. His green eyes get full of wonder and light, like a child on Christmas morning. It's the look that allowed him to get away with playing a defrosted caveman in 1992's *Encino Man*, a vine-swinging jungle dunderhead in 1997's *George of the Jungle* and a 35-year-old man who emerges into pre-millennial Los Angeles after spending his entire life in a bomb shelter, in this year's *Blast From the Past*. Even in last year's *Gods and Monsters* — a serious, subtle drama with Oscar nominee Ian McKellen that brought Fraser the best reviews of his career — the look of innocence is there. It's a look of joyful curiosity, unjaded and amazed.

It's the look he has right now, digging through a box of vintage Polaroid camera accessories on the back counter of the Studio City Camera Shop in Los Angeles. He's fascinated by the pile of doodads and gizmos, assorted filters, crankshafts and timers. The box would appear to be filled with junk, but to Fraser it is a treasure chest, a pot of Polaroid gold.

He comes in here all the time, something he has been doing since he first arrived in Los Angeles in 1991, another unemployed actor in a beat-up car, driving down from Seattle, where he had studied theater at the Cornish College of the Arts, an actors conservatory where

theater is considered a noble art form, something to be treated with dignity. Yet here he was in Hollywood, in the belly of the lowbrow beast.

Fraser's father, Peter, a Canadian tourism commissioner, and mother, Carol, had the family constantly on the move. (Brendan is the youngest of four sons.) Born in Indianapolis on Dec. 3, 1968, Fraser spent his adolescence in Europe, fascinated by and absorbed in the architecture, the history, the culture, the arts. He attended the exclusive Upper Canada College Preparatory School in Toronto, surrounded by the sons of prime ministers and emirs, and went on to Seattle to pursue his theatrical dreams.

Fraser had always kept a handwritten journal — daily chronicles of the things that happened to him, the things he saw, the worlds that swirled around him. But over the years, the journals started to feel inadequate to him. The words were not enough.

"I gave up on the journals because I was repeating myself," he says as he rummages through the box of accessories, uttering an occasional "Wow" when he finds something he likes. "I wanted to find a way to visualize what I was seeing. I wanted images."

And thus, the Polaroids. Fraser now owns 14 Land cameras (the original name for the Polaroid) and has one of them with him practically everywhere he goes. He likes their im-

mediacy, the ritual of pulling out the film and watching the image appear, a memory frozen right on the spot.

"Anyone who takes that many photographs is interested in the world," says Sarah Jessica Parker, who co-stars with Fraser in July's *Dudley Do-Right*, in which he plays the pure-hearted but clueless Mountie — yet another naive and bumbling cartoon hero.

"I think somebody has to be pretty bright to play someone so simple and naive," Parker says, "because very few people are good at playing themselves."

"I don't think Brendan strategizes as much as most young actors do," says the film's director, Hugh Wilson (who also directed *Blast From the Past*), when asked if Fraser might have typecast himself by playing so many innocents. "That may be to his detriment. Although I admire him for it. He's more true to himself than to his career."

This month, though, Fraser will finally get to play a real, live action hero when he stars in Universal's big-budget megaeffects remake of *The Mummy*. This time, his character is the opposite of naive: a disaffected Legionnaire who explores ancient Egyptian tombs in search of fortune but instead discovers the embodiment of evil, a cursed ancient priest who unleashes plagues and sandstorms and all sorts of icky things. Fraser must stop him in order to save both the world and, of course, a beautiful girl, played by Rachel Weisz (*Swept From the Sea*).

"I wanted Brendan because he could be heroic and charming at the same time," says director Stephen Sommers. "Somewhere between Errol Flynn and Harrison Ford."

Fraser had barely more than a week off between shooting *The Mummy*, which was filmed in Morocco and England last summer, and *Dudley Do-Right*, which started shooting in Vancouver, British Columbia, in the early fall. And he has already begun preparations for *Monkey Bone*, a fairy tale combining animation and live action to be directed by Henry Selick, who previously directed *James and the Giant Peach*.

This is the kind of schedule Fraser has been keeping ever since his *Encino Man* de-



but in 1992. That same year he made *School Ties*, in which he played a Jewish football star struggling in a WASP-infested prep school. And the movies kept coming, at least two a year — everything from mainstream comedies, like 1994's *Airheads*, to small, stylized independent films, like 1998's *Still Breathing*.

Somehow, in the midst of all that work, Fraser managed to fall in love. He and Afton Smith, 31, a former actress, were married last September in Los Angeles while Fraser was on a one-week break from *Dudley Do-Right*. She went back to Vancouver with him, and they spent their honeymoon on the set.

I've been counting, and you have made 17 movies in the past seven years.

That's a lot.

Does it feel like a lot? Do you ever stop and think, man, I've got to step back for a second? I have always had a hunger for experience, and I love the process of filmmaking, so I don't really want to step back.

Do you get any satisfaction by going from something as silly as 'George of the Jungle' to something as dramatic as 'Gods and Monsters'?

Well, yeah, because it proves to people that an actor can play different roles. But if people expect to see a character in *Gods and Monsters* who is anything like George, then obviously, that's not what they're going to get. It's been said that I own the patent on playing a naïf. So I guess it's nice to change their perceptions. But it's almost as if people thought I was playing a dramatic role for the first time in my life. Like, "Oh, my God. Look at that. He didn't smash into anything. It's amazing."

Ian McKellen has been an idol of yours for a very long time, since you were in college. Now that you've worked with him and become friends, what impresses you most about him?

He has a quality that goes beyond himself. He draws you in, and he is not without backbone. He never studied as an actor, which I find hard to believe. He studied literature at Cambridge. And he would ask me, "What exactly do you *do* in acting school?" I would try to explain, and then I found myself asking, what *did* I do? Well, we wore tights and had sword fights, and we became trees — things like that. It all seemed so important at the time, but now I can't recall any of it.

What's the best advice he ever gave you?

Whenever we were about to do a scene, he would say, "Let's say the words. Don't act. Let's just say the words."

I know that one of the reasons you wanted to play Dudley Do-Right is that your great-grandfather was a real-life Mountie. How much do you know about him?

I've read about him. His picture is in every history book about the Mounties. He always got his man. They all did, although his

man turned out to be a dead man.

Excuse me?

He went somewhere way up north with a dog-sled team because a miner was found dead. And they thought it was foul play, because the body had been "worried by hounds." So he brought a coroner, and it took months to get there through the snow. This is in the late 1800s. He didn't get there until spring, and they hadn't kept the body on ice. I imagine it was a fumaceous experience, because I know the coroner became ill.

So, who killed the miner?



They figured out there was no foul play. I think the miner got drunk, fell down, hit his head and drowned in a stream. But still, my great-grandfather got his man.

The character you play in 'The Mummy' is an Indiana Jones type of adventurer, which is a far cry from the roles you've done before. Tell me why you wanted to do 'The Mummy.'

I wanted to go to North Africa. We shot for

two and a half months in Morocco, and that was a wonderful adventure in and of itself. And particularly after doing *George of the Jungle*, I am a big fan of computer-generated imagery and all the tools they have. I mean, I never cease to be amazed.

You really like the whiz-bang part of making movies, don't you?

I do. I love it. I love the machinery, the props. Prop guys are the coolest guys on the set — they've got all the toys.

How was it, playing the cool-under-pressure action hero for a change?

Well, half the time, he really doesn't know how to get out [of trouble]. He just has to pretend that he does. So there's a bit of the dumb-luck hero in this guy, too.

What was it like to ride a camel at full speed?

Hey, I have a sense of duty. So if that means being given a camel and pretending you know what you're doing, then I will.

Did you get bit or spit on?

No, they slobbered a lot, though. They're noisy, temperamental and smelly. And they had really serious attitudes, *major* 'tudes. But damn,

"I LOVE HER MORE and more every time I think about her," says Fraser of his wife, Afton, seen here with him in January (top); getting up close and personal in 'The Mummy' (left); with 'Gods and Monsters' co-star Ian McKellen (bottom).

they look good on camera.

Tell me what it's like, shooting in Morocco. Was it difficult, dangerous? Did you wear a veil?

Half the time, I had no idea where we were going. It was a follow-the-sun kind of thing. We had a military helicopter parked on standby, just in case of an emergency. I asked my driver once, "Where are we, really?" And he said, "If you go over that mountain range over there, you'll never come back. It's Algeria." So, that's what all the military hardware was around for. Later on, when we got back to England, I asked what exactly was the political climate [in Morocco]. Somebody told me that they'd taken out kidnapping insurance on all of us, but we didn't know it.

Did you smoke any opium?

No. God, no. I wouldn't be here today if I had. We lost crew members because of that. I think they're still there. [Laughs]

You moved around so much, early on. Were you good at being the new kid?

I was shy, and I had to overcome that, but what kids aren't shy in a new situation? I just made sure I was accountable for my actions and I had the courage to have a personality. *You do have sort of an odd mix of American energy, Canadian politeness and a vaguely*

European sensibility. Do you think you'd be significantly different if you'd spent your entire life in North America?

We're the sum of our experiences. Maybe it's given me a bit more tolerance. It opened my eyes to appreciating different things, particularly theater. When I was living in Holland, there were roving circuses that would come around from Belgium and Germany. And they were poor circuses, family circuses with maybe one pony with a plume on its head and a few clowns with routines that were — when I think about them — very dark. One of the bits was a clown musician who started off with a big double bass, and other clowns would trick him out of his instrument. Then he'd whip out a guitar. And they would trick him out of that too. And it went on and on until all he was down to was a piccolo. When he got down to the piccolo, he somehow tricked the other clowns, but then the spotlight went out, and I remember thinking, we'll never know what happens to him.

Were those the kinds of experiences that made you want to study theater?

Yeah. I saw people really enjoying themselves, and there was something about what happened onstage that made me realize that when you're up there, no matter what happens, you're in control of the situation.

You've mentioned how much you enjoyed the adventure of living in different places as a kid, in much the same way that you enjoy making movies. But now that you're a 30-year-old married guy, isn't that going to change?

Yeah, I know it will. I have a nesting instinct that is stronger than it used to be.

What has been the most surprising thing about being married?

How easily I take to it. It's like the pressure is just off. I have less anxiety about everything.

How did you and Afton meet?

Actually, it was her dog who introduced us — that would be Wiley the wonder dog. It was in 1995 at a Fourth of July barbecue party in Los Angeles, and Wiley came bounding through the party, through all these people who wanted to pet her but couldn't because she ran around everyone. And then she came straight to me. She picked me. And we've been together ever since, all three of us.

Were you and Afton wavelength compatible right from the start?

Yeah, definitely. We both have the same birthday. I think that's probably what clinched the deal. It was, like, our third date, and I had to prove it with my driver's license. She frisked me for my driver's license.

So, other than her dog liking you and having the same birthday, what made her special?

I'm going to agree with the way a friend of hers described her: as a gazelle in galoshes.



IT'S BEEN SAID I OWN THE PATENT ON PLAYING A NAIF. BUT IT'S ALMOST AS IF PEOPLE THOUGHT THAT [IN 'GODS AND MONSTERS'] I WAS PLAYING A DRAMATIC ROLE FOR THE FIRST TIME. LIKE, 'LOOK AT THAT! HE DIDN'T SMASH INTO ANYTHING. AMAZING!' <<<<<

I'm not sure what that means.

It means she can escape these earthly bounds with a leap, with such élan, even if she's wearing the galoshes. She can splash through the mud. What can I say? She speaks my language. She's the wrong person to play Trivial Pursuit Silver Screen Edition with, 'cause she will whip your butt. Or Scrabble, for that matter. She can do a crossword puzzle in ink, and she gives the most amazing foot rubs.

You're starting to cry a little bit, aren't you?

It's just that I love her more and more every time I think about her. I don't get this way very often. I don't really want you to see me like this. Let's move on.

OK, although I don't think this is anything to be ashamed of. I mean, to see someone care this much about his wife, it's pretty awe-inspiring. I did weep when I saw her in her wedding dress. Oh, man, I lost it.

Would you rather talk about the house you bought in the Hollywood Hills?

Yeah. I bought it a couple of years ago, took it down to the sticks, put it back together and made it a place that can receive 5 or 10 people at once. I really did enjoy the process, because as the house grew, my relationship with Afton grew, which made the house even better. I swung a hammer maybe three or four times during this, and hit my thumb, so it's better that I let other people do most of the work. Although, I did put in a grill the other day. It was level and everything.

You have one of the most romantic and, at the same time, silliest marriage-proposal stories I've ever heard. Why did you do what you did?

Because I knew she would say yes. I knew that she loved me, and I knew that I loved her. So that's why I wanted to get creative. But you know what? Any time you propose,

no matter how clever you think you're being, you get your heart thumping, because it's *really happening*.

So, tell me the story.

We were in Paris. And my camera, one of the original old Polaroids, had a timer on it, so I had devised a plan to pin a note card inside my jacket that said "Marry me." And when I opened it, the camera would take a photograph of the two of us, and together we would look at the photo and she would see that it said "Marry me." But I only opened my jacket when she wasn't looking, so she wouldn't see the note until she saw the picture. But things kept going wrong. The camera kept falling over, or a guy would step in front of the lens, and I started to panic.

Did she think you were just being goofy?

Yeah. She asked me, "What is *wrong* with you?" It was freezing cold, and we were wearing these big coats, and I was, like, sweating. Finally, I got one photo that was really good, and I handed it to her, but she was busy saying, "It's late. We've got to go back to the hotel and pack." She looked at the picture once and said, "OK, nice picture. Now can we go?" And I went, "Well, could you look at it *closer*?" She looked again and said, "Is that a price tag in your jacket?" Then she opened my jacket, saw the note, compared it to the picture, and then she became very quiet. Since I was already on bended knee, I asked her to marry me. And she just kept crying. And I was like, "Is that a yes or a no?"

Where is that photograph today?

In a vault. That's the thing about a Polaroid. You don't get a negative. There's only one print.

Are kids going to be part of this deal?

That's a discussion that we've only had in abstract terms, but the answer is yes. But I want to feel that I really know more about what it is to be a man, truly be a man. When you have a child, it's like a company is being established. And I just really need to get my affairs in order. I need to go into pre-production, basically. *And back to what I asked you before: Won't you have to slow down? You can't make three movies a year if you're going to have a family.* Maybe I'll do one large part, one small part. But because I'm getting all these great scripts, it's hard to say no. But look, it's a wonderful problem to have. I mean, it really is more like: Hmm, which piece of pie will I have? You should just be thankful you've got some pie.

When you close your eyes and envision yourself in 10 years, what is the picture you see?

It's stymieing to answer that question. I think I probably don't want to see it. I don't want to peer into the future, because I want to be surprised. I want to be delightfully surprised. ■

Joe Rhodes is a free-lance writer based in Texas.